

Foundations Lesson #1

The Word of God

The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man. They are our infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct. It is therefore most important that we search out God's word daily – reading it, obeying it, meditating upon it, and relying on it – as our source of inspiration, guidance, and power to live a godly life.

The Bible is God's book. It is what God has said; it is what he has written for us. We know that it is true and reliable because he is true and reliable. There are many things God has spoken by his voice, but there are certain things that are so important that God has memorialized them for us by putting them into written form. They are the foundation for everything we believe. They provide an anchor for us in all the uncertainties of life.

The Bible can be thought of as the manufacturer's handbook for all of life. When you buy a larger item, you usually get a handbook with it – a document written by those who have made the item, telling you how the item works, what you can do with it and what you can't do with it, what the item is designed to do and what it is not designed to do, how to service the item, and so on. Those people who handle the item according to what is written in the manufacturer's handbook usually get the most and longest benefit from that item. Since God is the creator of all things, he knows best how every item in his creation functions to its maximum potential – what it was designed to do and what it was not designed to do, what will cause it to function well and what will cause it to be ruined, and so on. If we humbly accept the truth that God knows far more about life than we do, and that his instructions to us on how to live life are far better than anything we can come up with, then we can read his written word to gain the wisdom, the knowledge, and the understanding we desperately need in order to handle life properly, the way it was designed to be lived by **The Creator** himself.

We would also do well to understand God's purpose in providing us humans with a written document. Although it's likely that God considered thousands of factors when he decided to give us his message in writing, probably his main purpose was that he wanted a close relationship with each one of us. God longs to be close to you, me, and every other human he has created. His word gives us truths, illustrations, stories, parables, and other forms of writing that show us not only His great love for us, but also what we need to believe, to do, and to understand in order to be close to him. If one of us were to receive a handwritten note in the mail from the prime minister of Great Britain, or the emperor of Japan or the president of the United States inviting us to be their personal friend, we would probably feel quite honored, and we might do some research to find out about them, so that we could talk to them and relate to them more intelligently. That will probably never happen to most of us, but what we have received is far better. The all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving, all-knowing creator of the universe has invited us into an intimate relationship with himself. Then, to top it all off, he has already provided a written document that tells us about what he likes and does not like, what is important to him, what he expects from us, how he interacts with humans, what causes him pleasure or grief, and so on. We would have **no idea** how to live in order to please God unless God had revealed that to us. So, graciously, he has provided his word for us to meet that huge need.

So, let's go to Roman Numeral number one on our outline. The Bible is God's word. One author has said this,

QUOTE #1

The oneness or unity of the Bible is a miracle. It is a library of 66 books, written by over 35 different authors, in a period of approximately 1,500 years. Represented in the authors is a cross section of humanity, educated and uneducated, including kings, fishermen, public officials, farmers, teachers and physicians. Included in the subjects are religion, history, law, science, poetry, drama, biography and prophecy. Yet its various parts are as harmoniously united as the parts that make up the human body.

For 35 authors, with such varied backgrounds, to write on so many subjects, over such a long time span in absolute harmony is a virtual mathematical impossibility. It just

plain couldn't happen. Then how do we account for the unity of the Bible? The only adequate explanation is that “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

...which leads us to the first point on our outline, the Bible was written by God the Holy Spirit. If you'll notice on your outline just beneath “The Bible was written by God the Holy Spirit” there's a roman numeral two, “Timothy”, the number three, followed by a colon, and then the number sixteen. I'd like to take out just a minute to explain what all that means. If you turn to the table of contents in your Bible, you'll see that it's divided into two sections. The first section is called the Old Testament, and the second section is called the New Testament. If you look at the first entry under the Old Testament, it should say, “Genesis,” followed by “Exodus,” “Leviticus,” “Numbers,” and so on. These are called books of the Bible. So the Bible contains a total of 66 books, 39 of which are a part of the Old Testament, which starts with the book of Genesis and goes through to the book of Malachi. Then the New Testament contains the other 27 books of the Bible, starting with the book of Matthew and going through all the way to the book of Revelation. If you find the 16th book of the New Testament, you'll see that its name is “II Timothy.” If you turn to the book of II Timothy in your Bible, you'll see that it has four chapters. Chapter numbers can be larger bold numbers flush with the left margin of the text or they can have their own heading, depending on how the editors of your particular Bible decided to print them. Then, the text of each chapter has small numbers, in order, interspersed throughout it, which are called verse numbers. So going back to the entry on our outline, II Timothy refers to the book of Second Timothy, the number to the left of the colon refers to the chapter, in this case, chapter three, and the number to the right of the colon refers to the verse, in this case, verse 16. So if you find II Timothy 3:16, it should read something like,

II Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Now if your Bible doesn't say exactly the same thing, don't worry about it. When the Apostle Paul wrote the book of II Timothy back in somewhere around the year A.D. 63, he didn't write it in English as you can imagine. He wrote it in an ancient Greek. So for hundreds of years many people have undertaken the job of learning this ancient Greek and translating it into languages that are in use today so that people can understand God's message in the language that they speak, read, and write. I, for one, am really grateful for their work. But many different people over hundreds of years have undertaken the job of translating the Bible into the English language from the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic text, and they have used a variety of English expressions in their translations. So two different translations of the Bible may render the original text a little differently. Bible translation is, after all, highly complex work.

Either way, the truth of this verse is clear. All Scripture (the word “Scripture” simply refers to the text of the Bible) is God-breathed. It has been breathed, authored, or inspired by God the Holy Spirit. Now every book of the Bible has one or more human authors, but this verse gives us the greater reality of what was happening as they were writing. God was breathing upon them, inspiring them, so that the words they ended up writing down were actually exactly what God wanted to say. Isn't it exciting to know that the great and awesome God we serve chooses to do some of his work by flowing through human beings? If you have surrendered your life to God by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, God would even like to do some of that through **you**. But we'll get into that more in future lessons.

For now, let's go back to our outline and look at the next Scripture reference.

II Pt. 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

That word for “carried along” is an original Greek word that appears only in a few places in the New Testament. One of them is in the book of Acts, chapter 27, verse 15, which says,

Ac. 27:15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.

So we get this picture of a violent storm on the Mediterranean Sea, and Luke and the others that are with him on the ship realize that they are powerless to oppose this storm, and so the storm is driving this ship along. Wherever the storm wants the ship to go, that's where the ship is going. In the same way, wherever the Holy Spirit wanted these authors of the Scripture to go in their writing, that's where they went. They were carried along, or driven along, by the Holy Spirit. I suspect that most of them had little or no idea that they were actually writing Scripture when they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit, but God is well able to work through any human being without their being aware of what he is doing through them. Be that as it may, the final result was that the Bible was written by God the Holy Spirit. That's what's important.

We should also be encouraged that for those of us who believe, the author of the Scriptures has taken up residence in our lives, and he, the Holy Spirit, is well able to give us understanding, insight, and illumination into what we're reading. If you had been alive back in 1610, and you were reading a Shakespeare play – say, King Lear or Romeo and Juliette – and you were having trouble comprehending what the author meant, if you were able to travel to where Shakespeare lived, you could have asked him for the meaning. Since he wrote it, he could explain it. When we're reading the Bible, there's no need to travel to have a meeting with the author. All we have to do is ask. What God has written, he's more than happy to explain, and that's a great benefit to us. And, as we ask him the questions we have, we begin to experience him as our teacher, which is an important aspect of our relationship with him.

So because the Bible was written by the Holy Spirit, the Bible is infallible – which is the next point on our outline. Jesus himself said,

Jn. 10:35 [Jesus speaking] – and the Scripture cannot be broken –

Mt. 5:17-18 [Jesus speaking] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

These verses also show us God's tremendous watch-care over his word. Nothing will disappear from his word until everything is accomplished. For hundreds of years, the Bible has been the object of great antagonism and persecution. Bibles have been burned by the thousands. Corrupt clergymen have chained Bibles to the pulpit under the guise of not wanting the common people to “misinterpret” what it said, but actually to hide their own twisting of God's sacred message. People who translated the Scriptures into the language of the common people were burned at the stake. The blood of those holy men and women has provided us with the access to God's message we enjoy today. But despite all the fierce resistance, the Bible has survived, and it will continue to survive. God's holy book is more readily available today, and in many more languages, than it ever has been in the history of humanity. There is an enormous job still ahead of us, but progress has been made.

Num. 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

I Sam. 15:29 [Samuel is speaking] He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”

There are a few things you will never hear God say. You will never hear God say, “I didn't mean it.” God's words are so full of integrity – because **he** is so full of integrity – that he always says what he means and means what he says. Another thing you will never hear God say is, “Oops.” That's

right, "Oops." God is never caught off guard or unaware. Everything that is happening today he knew thousands of years ago would be happening today. And he carefully oversees every detail of it. And, in the Scriptures we just quoted, it's clear that God will never say, "I changed my mind."

Pr. 30:5 Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Ps. 12:6 And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.

I will admit that there are some things written in the Scripture that would appear to be contradictions, but in actuality, the words of God are flawless. I say they **appear** contradictory. Let me give you an example. In Matthew's gospel, in the account of the crucifixion, it says that two robbers were crucified with Jesus, and both of them heaped insults on Jesus, along with quite a few other people. In Luke's gospel, the same scene is described, but Luke records that only one of the criminals crucified with Jesus hurled insults at him. The other turns to Jesus and says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." To that Jesus replies, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

So some people have asked the question, "Which one is the true account? Which one is correct?" The problem with that question is that it has already concluded that one of the accounts must be incorrect, and that is where the problem lies. Jesus was crucified at about nine O'clock in the morning. He didn't die on the cross until about three in the afternoon. What if Matthew walked by at 9:15a.m. and witnessed both robbers hurling their insults at Jesus. What if, two and a half hours later, the eyewitnesses that Luke got his information from witnessed the repentance of one of the criminals who by now had experienced a change of heart, and later told Luke what had been said? That would mean both accounts are true, they just took place at different times. We have to understand that all Scripture is true. When we come across something that appears to be contradictory, we need to ask ourselves, "What happened that makes both of these accounts accurate?" If you can't think of anything, I encourage you to pray and ask God for the answer. He'll let you know how they both work together in perfect harmony. After all, the Bible is his book. He wrote it. And he's more than happy to help you understand it.

There is one more verse I want to mention regarding the Bible being infallible.

Am. 3:7 Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.

You can ponder that verse for quite a while, but it tells us that God announces his plans before carrying them out. And that's another way we can appreciate the divine authorship of the Scriptures. In the **Additional Resources** section of this web page, there is a link that opens up a document on Fulfilled Prophecies. You can download it if you like. That document gives 23 of the prophecies about Jesus Christ which were written down as part of Sacred Scripture at least 400 years before Jesus was born. All the references are written on the document, so you can look them up if you choose to. My point is that God's telling us in advance, with 100% accuracy, what would take place, shows us that he, who is the Beginning and the End, is the author of the Scriptures and that they are completely reliable.

When I was a 20 year-old college student, the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible were an important factor in bringing me to the point where I gave my life to the Lord. Being an atheist at the time, I had no explanation for how something could be written down hundreds of years earlier and then be precisely fulfilled. Granted, someone could have tried to fulfill **some** of the prophecies, but none of us has any control over where we're going to be born, or if we will be betrayed, and if so, by whom and for how much money... You get the picture. Since there was no other reasonable explanation, I had to conclude that the people who believed in the God of the Bible were correct.

Next on the outline: The Bible is God's revelation of himself. It's important for us to understand that we humans, left to ourselves, would have **no idea** who God is, what he likes, what he doesn't

like, or what he might require of us. We are incapable of figuring that out or discovering it on our own. The only way for us to understand the nature of God is for him to reveal himself to us. Out of all the man-made religions in the world no two are alike. That shows us that when we try to search out who God is that we don't even come close to agreeing with one another. Fortunately, God has already provided the solution to that problem by revealing himself to us. Although God may reveal himself to people in a variety of ways, **the primary way** God has revealed himself is by his written message, the Bible. And because the Bible is infallible, every other experience we may have must be evaluated based on what the Scriptures have to say about it.

Because God has graciously given us his word, we can know his nature – what he likes, what he doesn't like, what makes him angry, what pleases him, what grieves him, what delights him, etc. But God has not just given us his word so that we can know **about** him, he wants us to know him personally, experientially, intimately. God hungers, thirsts, and even aches for a close relationship with each human he has created. So our goal in reading the Bible should be to know God and his ways, so that we can live according to what pleases him, and that we can have a close relationship with him. With the Bible as our guide, the goal of our life should be to please God with everything we do, with every word we speak, with every thought we think, with every choice we make, and with every attitude we have. It can and needs to be our passion to know God, to love God, to please God, and to reveal God to others. Nothing in life is more important. Nothing. The Bible will help is in this quest.

Ro. 16:25-27 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him – to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Dt. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

QUOTE #2 The Bible is not a book of philosophy – even though it is philosophical.
The Bible is not a book of history – even though it is historical.
The Bible is not a book of science – even though it is scientific.
The Bible is God's message to us. It reveals Jesus Christ to us. It speaks to our greatest need.
If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.

More than anything else, the Bible reveals God to us. It is his love letter to his children. Then, next on our outline: The Bible is not to be altered. In other words, no adding or subtracting is allowed. And that only makes sense. God is perfect, and so what he has written is perfect. For any of us human beings to think that we are able to improve upon what God has written is sheer arrogance of the deepest and most profound variety. Some people have actually tried to add to or subtract from the Scripture. But anyone who thinks they are qualified to do so needs to repent of their great pride.

Dt. 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

Dt. 12:32 See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

And at the very end of the Bible, three verses before the end, it says this:

Rev. 22:18-19

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

I want to say a few things about our attitude toward the Bible as well, because our attitude can color how we understand God's truth. If someone has a strong conviction that all sidewalks should be purple, and they go to the Bible with the attitude that they know they can prove from God's word that all sidewalks should be purple, they may even find an obscure verse somewhere that leads them to the conclusion that God is on their side, even though the word "sidewalk" does not even appear in the Scripture. The issue here is attitude. It's necessary for us to approach God's holy word with humility. We should ask ourselves, "What does it say?", searching it out as people ready to be instructed, ready to learn, ready to soak up what God has said. It would even be a good idea to pray the prayer of Psalm 119, verse 18,

Ps. 119:18

Open my eyes that I may see the wonderful things in your law.

Then, it's also important not to take Scripture out of context. Let me explain what I mean by that. Very few verses in the Bible were written to stand by themselves. Which means for us to understand most verses properly, we need to know what has been written beforehand and afterward or, put another way, we need to understand the verse in its context. Let me give you a striking example of what can happen when we take a part of the Bible out of its context. Did you know that the Scripture clearly states that there is no God? That's right. Word for word, it says "There is no God." But now let me read you that portion of Scripture in its context.

Ps. 53:1a

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

I think you can see clearly that there is a drastic change in meaning here between when we **are** and when we **are not** faithful to keep that line of God's word in it's proper context.

II Tim. 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Foundations Lesson #1

The Word of God, Part Two

Roman Numeral two on our outline says, the Bible is powerful. Jesus used the Word of God to overcome the devil's temptations in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). In that passage of Scripture, the devil tempted Jesus in three different ways. Each time, Jesus replied by saying, "***It is written.***" He said, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" "It is written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Three temptations were met the same way: "It is written." If Jesus relied on God's word, how much more, then, do we need this power! The Scripture compares God's word to a fire (Jeremiah 20:9),

Jer. 20:9

But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29),

Jer. 23:29 “Is not my word like a fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

and a sharp, doubled-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12 / Ephesians 6:17).

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any doubled-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Eph. 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

If you're in a battle where the weapons being used are swords, and you have a sharp, doubled-edged sword at your side, if your enemy doesn't believe that your sword is a sharp, effective instrument of warfare, are you going to leave your sword in its scabbard? Are you going to use or not use the weapon at your disposal based on what your enemy believes? Of course not. You are going to use it because it *is* sharp, and it *is* powerful. What the person on the other side of the battle line believes about it is irrelevant. In the same way, when we are battling the kingdom of darkness it is a good idea to speak God's truth, even if those opposing us do not believe in the Bible. Let's remember that God's ability to touch them is not restricted. God is able to use his word to impact their lives even if they don't acknowledge its authority.

God's word is powerful. And so on our outline, we have a list of several things that the power of the word of God can and will accomplish. First, the power to save:

I Pt. 1:23-25a For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.

In the summer of 1978, my father was in the hospital, and I knew that his condition was serious. A friend handed me a Bible and told me that if I believed, I could always pray. As a good atheist, I didn't want to believe and I certainly didn't want to pray, but, like any good debater, I felt it would be a good idea for me at least to be familiar with my opponents' position. So starting in mid-July of that year, I read that Bible starting at the beginning like you would any other book, just to see what it said. By the time I got to the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, the vision of the ram and the shaggy goat were a bit too much for me, so I skipped over to the New Testament in late August. On September 26th in my college dormitory, I asked Jesus to come into my life as Lord and Savior. So in just under two and a half months, there was a complete turnaround in my life spiritually. Why? By far the main reason was the power of the word of God. God's word is powerful to save – even atheists!

Next, God's word is powerful to overcome sin.

Ps. 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Chuck Swindoll tells the story how he was in a city far away from home teaching at a conference. He got on the motel elevator and pressed the button for the seventh floor, which was where his room was. Just then, two scantily clad women got on the elevator. Since he was next to the floor buttons, he asked them which floor they would like to get off at. One of them seductively replied, “What about seven?” Chuck later testified that right then, he didn't think of the heartache his family would have to endure if he committed adultery. He didn't even think about how doing such a thing would wreck his ministry. At that moment, the only thing that flooded his mind was the word of God: “Marriage should

be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” He told the ladies he wasn't interested. There's power in the word of God to overcome sin.

Then there's power to set us free.

Jn. 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Lies keep us in bondage, but it's the truth of God's word that will set us free. Some people don't want to hear the truth about their own deficiencies and shortcomings. They would rather believe the lie that they are doing perfectly well than to have to deal with the truth of that they need to change. By the way, we all need to change. If we would just accept the truth of what God has to say about our failings as well as our wonderful position in him, we could be set free, because there's power in the word of God to set us free. No addiction, no bondage, no ingrained habit is more powerful than God's message.

Then there's power to nourish us spiritually.

Heb. 5:12-14 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The author of the book of Hebrews is telling his readers: *Hey, you should be growing up faster than what you are. You still need milk, not solid food!* The good news is that the Bible has plenty of milk in it for the newborns, plenty of meat for the mature, and all kinds of spiritually nutritious fruits and vegetables to help any of us in any situation that we could possibly find ourselves in. Regardless of where you or I may be in our spiritual development, there is food in God's holy word that will nourish us, that will help us to grow, and that will bring us closer to him.

Comparing the word of God to food also shows us how badly we are in need of God's message. If our physical bodies do not have food for long enough, we die. We all understand how serious that is. But what food is to the body, God's message is to our spirit. If we don't feed on the word of God, we die spiritually, and the spiritual is far more important than the physical. It's a great tragedy that some believers are starving themselves, doing great damage to their spirits, by not feeding on the word of God.

Going on, the word of God has power to produce faith in us.

Ro. 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

After having over 40 years of ministry under my belt, I can tell you that those people I have known who have read their Bibles daily, who accepted the importance of Bible reading and disciplined themselves to do so every day without fail, who would not be deterred from the priority of absorbing the word of God rain or shine, they had a much stronger faith than those who did not. In fact, the difference was obvious to any onlooker. Why? Because, as our Scripture declares, faith comes from hearing the message. That's the most important way that our faith comes to us and grows in us. When we read God's sacred word, we hear his message.

Next, God's word has power to equip us.

II Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

For 14 seasons I worked as a professional tax return preparer. I traveled to many classes and seminars, read many periodicals, took many courses, and studied material from many websites in order to be properly equipped to do that job. As believers, our existence has great purpose and we have been called to accomplish much. The verse we just read identifies one of those jobs as doing good works. If we want to be properly equipped for this job, and other jobs as well, knowing the Scripture is necessary and useful. The word of God has power to equip us.

Next, the word of God has power to guide.

Ps. 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

This verse apparently refers to someone who is trying to walk when it's dark out, so he needs light in order not to stumble. So the comparison being made is that as we walk through this life, we can avoid stumbling because God's word is like a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. We can know where we are going because the Bible gives us guidance.

It's also important for us to know what God has already said, because what God has said yesterday will never contradict what he is saying today. Because he is the same yesterday, today and forever, his words from yesterday will still be in harmony with his words today. So the better we know his written word – which he spoke yesterday – the better we will be able to discern what he is speaking today. Knowing the Bible well puts us in a great position to more accurately hear and discern his voice today. God is a speaking God, and the words he speaks are pure, holy, and infallible, but our ears are not error free. Knowing the Bible helps keep us on the path of the straight and narrow.

There was a young couple at a large church where I was a member years ago. They were not married, but they were considering living together. So they decided to pray together that if God was not in favor of their living together in an unmarried state, that he would within the next ten minutes, send someone to the door. When no one came to the door within the allotted time, this couple felt they had received approval of their plans from God. They were in error. God has already said in his word, *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people* (Ephesians 5:3). There are some matters of guidance we simply don't need to pray about, because God has already made his will on the subject plain in the Scripture.

Then, God's word has power to make us wiser than our teachers.

Ps. 119:99-100 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

I hope that you meditate on the word of God and obey its precepts. And because you do, if you then have more insight than your teachers, please do me a favor. Don't boast about it. That wouldn't help you or anyone else. The Bible says, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." So even though we clearly see the power of the word of God here, let's be humble in the way we implement it.

Next, there's power to see prayer answered.

Jn. 15:7 [Jesus speaking] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

When we see the word "if" in Scripture, we should pay special attention. Most of God's promises to us are conditional, meaning *if* we do so-and-so, *then* he will do this-and-that. So the key to receiving those blessings is for us to do our part. God is always 100% faithful to do his part, but we have to meet the conditions in order to qualify. So in the verse we've just read, the great promise from the Lord is that we get to ask whatever we wish, and it will be given to us. That's powerful!!! But there is an "if" and it gives two conditions that have to be met: we must remain in him, and his words must remain in us. So when his words remain in us, that helps us to be positioned to see our prayer requests answered by the Lord. Hallelujah.

Going on, God's word has power to accomplish God's purposes.

Is. 55:11 [God speaking] so is my word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Several years ago, I got a phone call from a man I'll call Mike. I had been Mike's pastor for maybe two years, and he had left our church, and I had lost track of him. I loved Mike. It was a real joy having him in our church. He was calling from far away, and he wanted to encourage me. He said, "Do you remember when I was leaving your church, and you tried to tell me that it was a mistake? Well I didn't listen to you then, but I want you to know that you were right. I was being stubborn and I paid for it, but God's word doesn't return void; it accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it. I have remembered the things you taught me. I'm serving God today. So don't be discouraged when people don't listen. God knows how to get a hold of them later on. You just keep on doing what you're doing." [pause] When I heard that, I wanted to crawl through the phone line and give the guy the biggest hug I had. Mike was a living testimony that God's word will always accomplish the purpose for which he has sent it. It has the power to do that.

And then, God's word has the power to keep us from error.

Mt. 22:29 Jesus [speaking to the Sadducees] replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

From this statement of Jesus we can gather that if the Sadducees **had** known the Scriptures and the power of God, they would not have fallen into the error they believed. God's word is truth. Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, prayed with and for his disciples. You can read his prayer in John's gospel chapter 17. In verse 17 of that chapter he prays,

Jn. 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

God's word is true and reliable, and it has the power to keep us from error. Then on the outline I just put down "and much, much more" so that everyone would be able to see that this is not an exhaustive list, far from it. The more you and I walk with the Lord, the more we will discover the power in his word.

Foundations Lesson #1

The Word of God, Part Three

On our outline, Roman Numeral number three says, we must absorb the message of the Bible into our lives. Here's the key: the word of God is powerful, but that power is not going to have an effect on us if we leave our Bibles on the shelf collecting dust. There's a part that belongs to God and there's a part that belongs to us. God's part is providing his word. He's done that. Our part is absorbing it. God's word is living and active, and if we want it to be alive **in us**, then we must know it and live it, because the message that is alive in us is the message we are living.

Jeremiah compares this process to the eating of food (Jeremiah 15:16).

Jer. 15:16 When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

Mt. 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every

word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Job 23:12 [Job answering an objection of Eliphaz the Temanite] I have not departed from the commands of his lips [that is, God's lips]; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.

Healthy portions of God's word, well chewed and digested, will nourish us to be spiritually strong for every good work in Christ. The purpose in knowing the Bible is that we may better know the God of the Bible – knowing the Word of God positions us to be able to know the God of the Word. Again, the whole purpose of our existence is to know and love and please God. Bible reading and Bible studying is not an end in itself. Knowing what God has said helps us to **know him**. The goal is still an intimate **relationship** with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So with that in mind, let's take a look at our outline and see the first way we can absorb God's message: by reading it.

Eph. 5:10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

Eph. 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

We are being commanded to **find out**, to **understand**, what God wants. That takes work, but it's always more than worth it.

A missionary was holding a tent crusade in an African nation. Early in the meetings a man gave his life to Christ. After that, each night, he would be one of the first to be under the tent. He would radiate with the joy of the Lord. He would worship God with passion. This went on for about three weeks, until one night he came but his expression was downcast. The missionary went over to ask him what was wrong. The man replied, "It's like there are two village dogs on the inside. One is mean, ugly, and ferocious, but the other is equally determined to win." The missionary asked, "Which one wins?" to which the new convert replied, "the one I feed the most." He who feeds the sinful nature will by that nature reap corruption. But he who feeds the new nature, governed by the Holy Spirit, will reap joy and peace. We choose which nature we feed. When we read the Scriptures, we are feeding the new nature.

Next, it's important to believe what we read.

Jn. 20:31 But these [things Jesus did] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Lk. 24:25-27 He [Jesus] said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

There are people who do not believe that Jesus was born of a virgin. It's **not** that they have carefully studied the Scriptures to find out what God has to say on that subject and then reached a different conclusion from the rest of us. That's not it. Most of them will even freely admit that the Bible is quite clear that Jesus was born of a virgin. So why don't they embrace the doctrine of the virgin birth? Simple. They don't believe what God has written. Their faith does not embrace a God who is able to do anything. In Luke's gospel, chapter one and verse thirty-seven, the angel Gabriel says, "For nothing is impossible with God." That's clear, powerful, and comforting. That also means it's **easy** for **The Almighty** to cause a young virgin to be impregnated by the Holy Spirit, so that the resulting baby boy born is the Son of God. Doing that represents absolutely no problem to **The Almighty**. But because some people value their experience more highly than what God has written, they refuse to believe. That's a huge mistake. When we read the Bible, it's important for us to believe what we are reading.

Next on our outline, we absorb the message of the Bible into our lives by meditating on it.

Jsh. 1:8 [God speaking to Joshua] Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Ps. 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Ps. 119:48 I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.

In these and other verses, the Bible talks about meditating on God's message. I'd like to be clear about this word meditating. In the world today, there are various kinds of meditation that leave our minds in neutral as we gaze upon who-knows-what, usually in an effort to gain some kind of happy experience. But when the Bible refers to meditation, it's not some form of mysticism. The three verses just quoted make it clear *what* we are to be meditating on: God's law, his commands. In other words, we are to be thinking about God's message, mulling it over and over in our minds, like a cow chews its cud, until we have gained more and more understanding and insight as to how we can apply this to our lives, the nature of God that it reveals, the possible purpose for it being there, and so on. When we are at the bus stop waiting for the bus, or in the checkout line at the grocery store, or waiting to be called into the doctor's office, we have a great opportunity to use our time to meditate on God's word.

Then, memorizing.

Ps. 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Over and over again in Scripture we see that people were able to quote portions of God's word without looking it up, because they had committed it to memory; they had hidden God's word in their heart. As we've mentioned earlier, when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert, he was able to resist the devil's temptations by reciting portions of God's word from memory. He didn't whip out his pocket Torah and start reading from the fifth book of Moses. Back then, scrolls and parchment were much, much less common and more expensive than paper is today, so people spent more time and energy on memorization. But if we apply ourselves to memorizing as they did, we can have the same benefit they had.

On our outline, references are given for Peter, Stephen, and Paul, when they recalled God's word from memory as the need arose. I won't read those passages; you can look them up at your leisure if you like. But these men knew important verses from memory, so when the time came for them to give out those truths, they were able to draw from the storehouse of information they had already deposited in their minds and their hearts.

Scripture exhorts us to be prepared in season and out of season. "In season" refers to times that we can prepare for because we know what lies ahead. "Out of season" refers to those situations where we have no idea what's going to happen until it's in front of us. One important way we can be prepared "out of season" is for us to have portions of Scripture memorized, or "hidden in our heart."

Then, on our outline, the last – and most important – way we absorb the message of the Bible into our lives is by obeying it. If we do not obey it, we only hurt ourselves. Mark Twain once quipped that it wasn't the parts of the Bible he didn't understand that gave him trouble; it was the parts of the Bible that he *did* understand that gave him trouble. When Jesus said for us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us, most people don't have a problem in the world understanding what he meant. It's not understanding what he said that gives us a problem, it's obeying it that gives us a problem. But hearing the message of God does us no good unless we obey it. Listen to what Jesus

taught from Matthew chapter 7:

Mt. 7:24-27 [Jesus speaking] “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Jas. 1:23-25 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

Ps. 119:4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.

Ps. 119:57 You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words.

Ps. 119:60 I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.

I understand that in the movie, “The Ten Commandments,” Moses has a line that goes something like this: “You cannot break the law of God. You can only break yourself against the law.” I think what that means is that the law of God is so true, so solid, so righteous, so powerful, that it remains unscathed regardless of what we do. It doesn't change. It can't be injured. But if we break the law, we suffer the consequences. We get hurt. We only harm ourselves by breaking the law of God.

So let's read, believe, meditate on, and memorize the word of God. And while we're doing all that, let's be careful to obey everything we are learning. Amen. God bless you all.